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For Assistant Secretary Feltman from Ambassador

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [KDEM](#) [QA](#) [HA](#)
SUBJECT: Engaging Al Jazeera on Haiti

REF: STATE 5277

¶1. (SBU) On Sunday, January 17, Al Jazeera's English (AJE) news channel, headquartered in Doha, began running inaccurate coverage of U.S. and international relief efforts in Haiti. At times, the coverage used inflammatory language, such as accusing the U.S. military of setting up a "mini-Green Zone" at Haiti's airport and shipping in weapons and soldiers instead of humanitarian aid.

¶2. (SBU) At Ambassador's direction, the Embassy took the following actions:

-- informed NEA/PPD senior staff of the trends in AJE's coverage, who quickly informed senior officials and arranged for an appearance by the Department Spokesman on AJE from its Washington bureau within hours.

-- When U/S McHale decided to call AJE Director Tony Burman during the early morning hours of January 18, ensured that Burman was ready for the call and understood the serious concerns that the Undersecretary would convey.

-- Monitored AJE's coverage on January 19 and 20, which continued to be largely inaccurate and confrontational, but less and less so.

¶3. (SBU) By the morning of January 20, AJE's coverage had evolved markedly, with reporting focused on the work being done by U.S. military forces - particularly airdrops - and 50 orphans who had been sent to the United States on an expedited basis. AJE's 1300GMT bulletin began, for example, with images of the U.S. military distributing aid, with a voiceover saying, "U.S. troops touch down, expanding their reach into other disaster-hit areas." The bulletin also carried a clip of an interview with U.S. Lt. Mark Weinberg, explaining how his particular group was distributing aid.

¶4. (SBU) Comments by Al Jazeera correspondents during the morning of January 20 included more context than on previous days. For example, correspondent Theresa Bo cited UN sources as saying that the obstacles to delivering aid were still immense, because the port had been destroyed by the earthquake, and the roads were not good, but "aid agencies are doing their best."

¶5. (SBU) Ambassador has directed Embassy staff to continue monitoring AJE's reporting, and to communicate these observations immediately to Washington. If AJE, or any of Al Jazeera's channels, revert to inaccurate coverage, Ambassador will not hesitate to intervene at higher levels, starting with the Qatari Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Al Jazeera Network.

LEBARON